

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on EXTRA 14/95 (ASA 33/02/95, 10 February 1995) - Fear for safety / Death Penalty

PAKISTAN      John Joseph, Christian human rights activist  
                  Salamat Masih, aged 14, Christian  
                  Rehmat Masih, aged 40, Christian

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Amnesty International continues to fear for the safety of all those associated with the blasphemy case in which Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih were sentenced to death on 9 February. These people include John Joseph, a key witness in the trial for the murder of a Christian charged with blasphemy and killed by Islamists; Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih, both on death row in Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore, and lawyers, human rights activists and friends and family members of Salamat and Rehmat Masih.

On 13 February, an appeal against the death sentences was filed in the Lahore High Court; it argued that the conviction was "against law and facts of the case". Human rights lawyer Asma Jahangir who defends the two Christians, said on 15 February: "it is a case of no evidence" as there was no material evidence to prove that the defendants had committed the offence.

Eye-witnesses to the appeal hearing in the Lahore High Court on 16 February said that defence lawyer Asma Jahangir was loudly insulted by lawyers representing the prosecution and prevented from addressing the court. Islamists outside the court demanded the death of the defendants, their lawyers and Benazir Bhutto and threatened to kill them even if the appeal was to lead to an acquittal. The disturbance forced the judges to adjourn proceedings till 20 February. Noisy demonstrations of several hundred Islamists took place outside the High Court building. Eye-witnesses said that police did not effectively control the mob which surged forward as Asma Jahangir attempted to leave the building. Her car window was smashed and her driver beaten but friends shielded her till she was taken away under police escort. Islamist groups have issued calls to sympathizers to appear at the next hearing in large numbers.

According to a letter from the High Commission of Pakistan in London of 14 February, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has expressed "shock and surprise" at the death sentences and announced that her government would seek to amend the blasphemy law and appealed to the opposition political parties to extend their support to the government in this respect. On 15 February, a lawyer in Lahore filed a charge against Benazir Bhutto alleging that she had committed contempt of court by such remarks which were also published in the press. The charge was referred to the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court. Islamist groups have also called for Benazir Bhutto to be charged with blasphemy for her suggestions to have the law amended.

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Salamat and Rehmat Masih in Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore where another Christian, Tahir Iqbal, died in mysterious circumstances in 1992. The safety of John Joseph, the key eye-witness in the case of the murder of Manzoor Masih, also remains a matter of serious concern. He is in hiding and always in the presence of several male members of the community. Relatives have told Amnesty International that "he is disturbed since the shooting in April 1994 in which he was also injured and needs professional care". The main assailant on Manzoor Masih is the complainant

in the blasphemy case against Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih. The next hearing in the murder case is 16 March. John Joseph was not required to appear in person during the last hearing on 12 February.

Amnesty International also fears that given the interference by Islamists in the appeal process, the convicts may not receive a fair appeal.

The letter from the Pakistan High Commission in London sought to give assurances that the two convicts have two rights of appeal, to the High Court and the Supreme Court and the possibility of the President's pardon; it adds that "fears expressed that Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih face execution in the near future are, therefore, totally unfounded". Amnesty International is, however, concerned that in the present highly charged atmosphere, extremist groups may again take the law into their own hands and attack, injure or kill members of the country's religious minorities or those who defend them. Such killings by militants targeting members of other religious groups have frequently occurred in the past. The government has on most of these occasions failed to provide adequate security to those at risk or to take all possible measures to prevent their recurrence. Amnesty International urges that concrete steps be taken in accordance with government statements, as in its letter of 14 February, that it is "fully aware of its responsibilities towards the minorities in the country ...[and] will make every effort, within the requirements of the law and the Constitution, to protect and safeguard the fundamental rights of its citizens". So far these steps have often been too few and too late.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- urging the government to take urgent and effective measures to protect John Joseph and lawyers, family members and others involved in this case from attacks by Islamists;
- condemning the death sentences passed on Salamat Masih, a child, and Rehmat Masih, both of whom are prisoners of conscience, and calling for their immediate and unconditional release;
- calling for, at the very least, the introduction of procedural changes to prevent innocent people from being charged under the blasphemy law.

**APPEALS TO**

1. President Farooq Ahmad Leghari  
Office of the President  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
**Faxes: 92-51-811390 (can be difficult to get through)**  
**Telexes: 54058 PSPUB PK**  
**Telegrams: President Leghari, Islamabad, Pakistan**  
**Salutation: Dear President**

2. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
**Faxes: 92-51-821835 (can be difficult to get through)**  
**Telexes: 5742 PMH PK**  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister Bhutto, Islamabad, Pakistan**  
**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

3. Mr Nabi Dad Khan  
Law Minister

Ministry of Law and Justice  
Pakistan Secretariat  
Islamabad

**Telegrams: Minister of Law, Islamabad, Pakistan**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat,  
or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 March 1995